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SUBJECT: SWAT COMMANDER'S DEATH MAY JEOPARDIZE NON-PARTISAN SECURITY  
LEADERSHIP IN BABIL

CLASSIFIED BY: Charles F. Hunter, Regional Coordinator, REO  
Al-Hillah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: The head of the Al-Hillah SWAT team was assassinated in his office on Oct. 13, days after being informed by the office of the Prime Minister (PM) that he was being replaced. Though the victim had a warrant out for his arrest on terrorism charges, a confluence of factors surrounding his death, including the political ties of his replacement, have raised suspicions and may not bode well for impartial leadership in Babil's security forces, heretofore a hallmark of the province. End summary and comment.

¶2. (SBU) Col. Salam Trad Al-Ma'mouri, the head of the Al-Hillah SWAT team, was assassinated along with his nephew and deputy, Maj. Tahir Al-Ma'mouri, by a bomb in Col. Salam's office at approximately 10:00 a.m. on Friday, October 13. The explosive was placed on the exterior window ledge of the victim's ground-floor office, directly behind his chair, and detonated with a remote-control trigger. Two other people were injured in the blast. Speculation points to an inside job. Col. Salam was a cousin of Babil Police Chief MG Qais Hamza Aboud Al-Ma'mouri, who has survived several assassination attempts himself, and the son-in-law of the provincial chief judge, A'ad Hatif Jabbar Al-Hasaani. (Note: He was also a close contact of the Regional Embassy Office and took part in weekly REO-hosted bilateral security coordination meetings. End note.)

¶3. (C) Col. Salam was in the process of being removed from his position as SWAT leader. Post has a copy of a letter dated Sept. 30 from Gen. Samir Abdullah Hassaani, director of the office of the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, directing the Minister of Interior to replace Col. Salam with Maj. Ali Hamid Abbas. The letter was sent on October 1 but evidently not received in Al-Hillah until a week later. The official transfer of command had not yet taken place, however, which is why Col. Salam continued to go to his office.

¶4. (C) Col. Salam was also under indictment from a court in Karbala on charges of involvement in a terrorist plot to kill relatives of Prime Minister (PM) Nuri Al-Maliki, and perhaps the PM himself, in late August 2006. The REO has heard that 14 people were arrested in Karbala in connection with this plot; twelve were released and the remaining two reportedly implicated Col. Salam. Judge A'ad came to the REO with Col. Salam on Sept. 29 to discuss the case. At that point they had not seen an arrest warrant and wanted merely to share information. The judge speculated that the Da'wa party was trying to seize control of the SWAT team in Babil. (Note: Maj. Ali Hamid Abbas is the brother of Sayyid Abbas Hamid Abbas, the leader of the Da'wa Party in Karbala, who is reputed to have links to death squads operating in that province. Karbala's governor and the PM are also members of Da'wa. End note.) Col. Salam attended

the REO's security coordination meetings as usual on Oct. 1 and 17.

15. (C) On Oct. 10 a clearly worried Col. Salam contacted REO staff to report that he was in danger and was asking U.S. Special Forces for help. The governor of Babil had refused to intervene, saying that the PM had treated him insultingly in the past. Three members of the former Transitional National Assembly had apparently been rebuffed in their attempt to seek clemency from the Prime Minister earlier in the week; according to one of them, Dr. Hanan, the PM had flown into a rage and said that Col. Salam had tried to kill his relatives. Three Council of Representatives members intended to plead his case later in the day, Col. Salam said. REO does not know whether the latter meeting actually took place. There was no subsequent contact with the REO prior to the assassination.

16. (S) Comment: Post has had indications via provincial IP Chief Gen. Qais (strictly protect) that some of Col. Salam's conduct and decisions may have been questionable, though Qais did not go so far as to accuse his cousin of involvement in terrorism. On the other hand, it may or may not be coincidence that PM Al-Maliki and the incoming SWAT chief hail from the same village, Tuwairij, on the border between Karbala and Babil Provinces. Particularly worrisome are unconfirmed rumors that Maj. Ali Hamid Abbas has ties to Iranian intelligence. Whatever the facts, this case is disturbing on numerous levels and may not bode well for what to date has been a remarkable record of professional, non-partisan leadership in Babil Province's security forces. End comment.

HUNTER